



Avoiding complications

When you have diabetes you may develop complications. Complications are the negative effects of having a condition or illness. There are a range of complications that may develop with either type 1 or type 2 diabetes, some potentially more serious than others. However, there is lots you can do to greatly reduce your chances of getting complications.

If your blood glucose or blood pressure levels are high for long periods of time you are much more likely to develop complications. If both are high this increases your risk even further. Keeping your blood glucose and blood pressure in a healthy range greatly improves your chance of avoiding complications and staying well.

Remember that every improvement you make to your blood glucose levels or blood pressure will reduce your risk of developing complications. Every improvement counts, even small ones. You don't have to be in the target range to reduce your risks. Although you will get the best improvement the closer your blood pressure and blood glucose levels are to the healthy target range.

These are the main complications of diabetes:

Eyes

- | Having diabetes can damage your sight
- | Keeping your blood glucose and blood pressure levels in a healthy range can greatly reduce your chance of developing eye damage
- | Diabetes eye damage must be picked up early for it to be successfully treated
- | If damage is picked up late there is often not much that can be done to save your sight
- | Get a full diabetes eye check when you first find out you have diabetes
- | Have regular diabetes eye checks every two years once you know you have diabetes
- | If you already have any diabetes eye damage have checks and treatment as directed by an eye specialist

[Read more about diabetes and your eyes . . .](#)

Feet

- | If you have diabetes you are more likely to develop foot problems
- | Foot problems in diabetes are often caused by nerve damage and/or damage to the blood vessels
- | Serious foot problems can often be prevented
- | Prevention depends on you maintaining healthy blood glucose and blood pressure levels, taking good care of your feet every day and

keeping in close contact with your doctor or foot specialist if you have a foot problem

[Read more about diabetes and your feet . . .](#)

Kidneys

- | Kidney disease can be real issue for many people with type1 and type2 diabetes
- | Keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure and blood fats (lipids) levels in a healthy range will reduce your risk of developing kidney problems
- | If kidney problems are picked up early there are treatments available that will delay its progress
- | The screening test for early kidney disease is done on your urine and is called microalbuminuria. You should have this test regularly (at least once a year)

[Read more about diabetes and your kidneys . . .](#)

Heart

- | Currently both men and women with diabetes have a high rate of damage to their cardiovascular system (that is, to their heart and blood vessels). But these rates are decreasing
- | Cardiovascular problems can be treated but preventing them happening is by far your best defence
- | You can greatly reduce your chance of developing heart or blood vessel disease by: stopping smoking, getting regular amounts of exercise (20-30 minutes on most days of week), achieving a healthy body weight, and achieving healthy blood cholesterol, blood pressure and blood glucose levels

[Read more about diabetes and your heart . . .](#)

Skin Conditions

- | You are more likely to develop skin problems when you have diabetes
- | Skin problems are more likely to become infected (especially if your blood glucose levels are high)
- | It is best to seek early help for any skin problem, as it can easily get worse
- | If you are a person who's prone to developing dry skin it's best to take action to keep your skin more supple. This includes protecting your skin from harsh chemicals, harsh weather and harsh soaps. It also includes using a light moisturiser on your skin regularly
- | You are far less likely to develop skin problems if you take good care of your skin, and have healthy blood glucose, blood pressure and blood cholesterol (lipids) levels

[Read more about diabetes and skin conditions . . .](#)

Gums and Teeth

- | People with diabetes are prone to get problems affecting their gums, teeth and mouth
- | Gum disease is the commonest mouth problem for people with diabetes
- | Gum disease can start at any age
- | There's lots you can do to prevent gum disease - brushing your teeth twice daily, flossing once every day, keeping an eye out for early signs of gum disease, and visiting your dentist at least twice a year

[Read more about diabetes and your gums and teeth . . .](#)

Sexual Health

If you are a man, impotence can be a problem:

- | Impotence is when a man has problems getting or keeping an erection
- | Although it is very common in men with diabetes, it's one of the least talked-about complications
- | There are a range of very successful treatments available for this condition
- | There are clinics and health professionals that specialise in impotence

For a woman:

- | Decreased vaginal lubrication (leading to discomfort during intercourse) is a common issue for woman with diabetes
- | Women with diabetes are more prone to get vaginitis (inflammation of the vagina) and yeast infections
- | It is possible that women with diabetes are at risk of developing a form of sexual dysfunction if they have autonomic nerve damage. At present this is poorly understood. Research in this area is progressing

[Read more about diabetes and impotence . . .](#)

[Read more about diabetes and women's sexual health . . .](#)

Thyroid Problems

Thyroid problems are not a complication of diabetes but do occur more commonly in those with diabetes.

[Read more about diabetes and thyroid problems . . .](#)

[Return to the top of this page . . .](#)